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STATE FOR NEA, L/NEA AND ECA MARIA KOUROUPAS
PARIS FOR US MISSION TO UNESCO

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DANISH EXHIBIT COMPANY PRESSES ON WITH
PLANS FOR IRAQI ANTIQUITIES ("NIMRUD GOLD")
EXHIBIT TOUR

REFTEL: BAGHDAD 3363

1. Summary. Denmark-based United Exhibits Group (UEG) is in Baghdad to secure an addendum to its exclusive July 2004 agreement with the Iraqi government to exhibit Iraq's "Nimrud Gold" collection internationally for five years. The initial agreement called for that tour to begin by October 2005. The amendment pushes that start date back to June 24, 2006. Additionally, UEG is now requesting U.S. military ground and air support to move the collection from its current depository in Iraq's Central Bank to Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) and on to either a European transit point such as Frankfurt or directly to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. The initial public showing of the exhibit would be at the Smithsonian's Sackler Gallery in June, followed by a still to be determined series of major European cities. End summary.

2. On October 23, Director Teit Ritzau and Iraqi-Danish Project Manager Dafir Mann of the Denmark-based United Exhibits Group (UEG) called on PA Counselor and CAO to seek support for UEG's project to organize a 5-year international tour of Iraq's "Nimrud Gold" collection. The principal purpose of Ritzau's and Mann's visit to Baghdad was to secure an addendum to their initial July 2004 exclusive agreement with the Iraqi Interim Government to tour this collection internationally. The addendum would postpone the tour's start date from October 2005 to June 24, 2006.

3. According to Ritzau, Iraq's current Minister of Culture, Nouri-Al Rawi, supports both the original agreement and the addendum. Ritzau expressed confidence that UEG would move forward with the tour and start on (the new) schedule in Washington. Dafir Mann related that he would head up both the "Nimrud Gold" tour and the newly founded, private Iraqi Cultural Project Organization (ICPO), which plans to open an office in Baghdad after the December 15 elections. ICPO would both coordinate the "Nimrud Gold" tour and organize other Iraqi cultural programs in the future. Presumably, such activities would be for-profit and not sponsored by the Danish government.

4. Currently, the "Nimrud Gold" collection, which Ritzau characterized as the "crown jewels of Iraq," resides in the vaults of Iraq's Central Bank. An unresolved challenge for the planned 2006 tour remains the security situation. To get the collection out of Iraq safely, Ritzau is proposing that the U.S. military move the entire collection (less than one cubic meter/60 kg overall) from the Central Bank to Baghdad's International Airport and then to either a European transit point (Frankfurt) or directly to Washington.

5. Post understands that the Denton Amendment (Title 10, Chap 22, Section 402, FM 41-10, D-5) precludes the use of military assets to transport non-military items other than for humanitarian assistance. However, our Dept of the Treasury representative here advises that a mechanism does exist for military support to the movement of gold that might be employed in this case so long as a continuous chain of custody can be maintained by UEG and Iraqi officials. We have not yet explored

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that option in detail with either Treasury or the military.

16. Ritzau assured us that the collection is soon to be inventoried, appraised and fully insured against all losses by Lloyd's of London. Following the exhibit's planned June 2006 opening at the Sackler, UEG is planning to tour the collection through 6-7 major European cities. Prior to the start of any European tour, however, much needed restoration work on the collection would be done with the assistance of the Smithsonian. According to Ritzau, Smithsonian officials are exploring the possibility of "a Fulbright scholarship" to go to Iraq's new State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) Director, Dr. Donny George, so that he might be present in Washington for the restoration work. Dr. George has not confirmed to us that he would be available for such a project, even were some sort of grant to be offered.

17. On October 26, PAC and CAO met with Minister of Culture (MoC) Nouri Al-Rawi, who stated that the original agreement had been signed by the previous MoC but not reviewed at the Council of Ministers level or approved by the National Assembly. He stated that the new government will review the agreement and amendment, in any case, in April 2006 and confirm at that time whether or not to proceed with the new June 24, 2006 exhibition commencement date.

18. Comment: In recent conversations with Dr. George (REFTEL), Post has understood him to be generally supportive of the idea of a tour of the Nimrud Gold at some point but with significant reservations about the timing. Touring the Nimrud Gold around the world before it has been on display in Iraq might be misunderstood and cause political fallout, not only for the museum but also for the Iraqi and U.S. governments. Dr. George also has expressed to us concern about logistical and security matters, such as accessing the Central Bank to pack the collection properly. Although UEG repeatedly assured us that the 6-month delay addendum has been signed, we still have no confirmation from either the MoC or SBAH that it has, in fact, actually been signed or that the proposed postponement plan fully addresses Dr. George's concerns. End Comment.

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